



FALL 2016 NEWSLETTER

PREVENTATIVE CARE CORNER:

COLON CANCER

Did you know that colon cancer is one of the more preventable forms of cancer?

Most colon cancers begin as precancerous polyps, which can be removed if they are caught early enough.

It is recommended that all individuals receive colon cancer screening starting at age 50. Individuals with a parent, sibling or child who experienced colorectal cancer should start screening sooner.

Screening typically consists of a colonoscopy. Other options, such as a sigmoidoscopy or stool sampling, are also available, but must be repeated more often, and are usually followed by a colonoscopy if abnormalities are detected.

Talk to your provider about your colon cancer risk and screening options at your next annual physical.

'TIS THE SEASON! GET YOUR FLU SHOT TODAY!

What is the flu?

Flu is caused by the influenza virus and spread by respiratory droplets, such as through sneezing or coughing. Outbreaks of influenza typically occur every winter. The flu is a respiratory illness consisting of symptoms like fever and chills, headache, body aches, fatigue, weakness, cough, sore throat and runny nose. The flu rarely causes intestinal symptoms. Most of the time, the flu is a self-limiting illness lasting several days. However, major complications related to flu can occur, including pneumonia and worsening of chronic conditions like COPD and diabetes. Roughly 200,000 people are hospitalized annually in the United States with flu or complications related to flu.

How do I prevent the flu?

The best way to prevent the flu is to receive the influenza vaccination annually. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that all individuals over six months of age receive a flu shot. Ideally, flu shots should be given by the end of October to offer optimal protection, but flu shots can be given anytime during the annual flu season. The influenza vaccine will not make you sick or give you the flu; the most common reactions are redness and soreness at the injection site. Aside from receiving the flu shot, the best way to protect yourself from the flu is to practice good hand washing.

What if I get the flu?

Even if you receive a flu vaccine, there is a chance you will develop flu-like symptoms if you are exposed to the virus, though these are usually milder than if you were not vaccinated. If you think you have the flu, it is important to call the clinic and schedule an appointment as soon as possible. Same-day appointments are available for your convenience, and we can perform a nasal swab flu test in the clinic to determine if you have contracted the influenza virus. If your flu test comes back positive, we can prescribe an antiviral medication for you. Antivirals work best if given within the first two days that you feel ill, which is why it is important to be seen in the clinic quickly. Antivirals can typically help to decrease the total duration of the illness by about two days.



GOT ALLERGIES?

Seasonal allergies affect roughly 20% of people, and may develop at any age, with symptoms including sneezing, runny nose, nasal congestion, eyes that are red and itchy, ears that itch and pop, itching of the nose and/or roof of the mouth, post-nasal drip, cough, and fatigue. Seasonal allergies can usually be diagnosed in the clinic from a patient's history and exam. However, allergists can perform tests on the skin or blood to identify specific triggers.

Some individuals only have symptoms during certain seasons, typically related to tree pollens in the spring, grass pollens in the summer, and/or weed pollens in the fall. Other people have symptoms year-round, and in addition to pollen allergies, are also commonly allergic to dust mites, animal dander, fungi and molds.

Treatment initially consists of avoiding triggers when possible. In terms of medications, typically an antihistamine like Zyrtec, Allegra or Claritin is used first, followed by a nasal steroid such as Flonase, Rhinocort or Nasocort. Some people also receive injections for their allergies. These take two forms. An allergist can perform "allergy immunotherapy" which consists of injections given regularly for several years. In the clinic, we sometimes provide a one-time steroid injection when an individual's allergy symptoms are very poorly controlled.

If you think you may have untreated seasonal allergies, or if your allergies are not well controlled, see your provider to discuss your treatment plan.



WHAT IS A MEDICARE WELLNESS PHYSICAL, AND DO I NEED ONE?

Medicare recommends (and pays for) an annual wellness physical for its enrollees. This physical focuses on ensuring that patients are up-to-date with preventative medicine tests and screenings, reviewing medical conditions and current medications, organizing care with other specialists, updating necessary immunizations, and assessing the patient's memory, mood, and social and physical levels of functioning.

Unlike routine office visits to address known chronic medical conditions and prescription refill requests, wellness physicals allow both patient and provider to take a step back and reassess the patient's current abilities and needs, so that we can provide the most appropriate and comprehensive medical care possible.

Patients on Medicare are strongly encouraged to schedule a yearly wellness physical at our clinic. In fact, it is good practice for all patients to schedule an annual well-person physical exam! Schedule yours today!

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